

Contending For The Faith With The Right Motive

Elder Oscar B. Mink

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“... Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (I Corinthians 10:31).

This text leaves no question as to what the motive of every saved person should be. All of our actions should emanate from a desire to magnify the Lord. The text is all-comprehensive, and leaves no thought, word, or deed to be executed without God’s glory being its design and premeditated end. A mock or superficial motive can stimulate the flesh, but such a motive will never produce or effect a change for the good of man or the glory of God. The right motive is the foundation of all honest contemplation, and a right motive is absolutely necessary in producing the good works which influence men to glorify the Father which is in heaven (**Matthew 5:16**).

Act and Attitude

The law of Moses dealt with sin as an act, but He that is infinitely more glorious than Moses, taught that a wrong attitude or motive is sin (**Matthew 5:27, 28**). The Mount Sinai code of law had no power nor penalty beyond an overt or manifest transgression. Its judicative arm was too short to reach the motive or attitude of those with whom it had to do, but Christ rendered a guilty verdict against the dormant evil in the heart (**Matthew 5:28**). Man judges from outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart (**I Samuel 16:7**), and so it was Christ said to the Pharisees: **“Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matthew 23:28)**. The law of Moses dealt with the motions of sin, but He that is absolutely holy, judges the motives of men. **“I, the Lord, search the heart ...” (Jeremiah 17:10)**. If the motive is wrong, no matter how correct the external action may be, it is unacceptable with God. The most eloquent, articulate, and doctrinally correct preaching, is but so many misspent words when the attitude or motive is wrong. It does man no good to honor Christ with his lips, when his heart is far from Him (**Mark 7:6**). What may appear as a good and commendable action is not in truth a good deed, unless the doer is willing for Christ to get all the glory for His effort. For acceptance with God, all of our labors are hinged on the purity of our motives, and if not prompted by a desire to glorify God, will be reduced to ashes at the judgment seat of Christ (**I Corinthians 3:11-15**).

Contending for the Faith

We are commanded in Scripture to **“Contend for the Faith” (Jude 3)**, but when **“the Faith”** is contended for with a malicious spirit, doubt is cast on the motive of

the contender. When such an ill spirit is manifested, it gives rise to the question: “Is the contender for the faith seeking to glorify God in his defense of the truth, or is it his motive to make his remonstrant look bad, and himself superior?” The Apostle Paul said: Some men “**glory in appearance, and not in heart**” (II Corinthians 5:12). The saint is never to seek the approbation of his peers at the expense of God’s glory. Again, I refer to Paul on this point as he said, “... **Do I seek to please men? ... I should not be the servant of Christ**” (Galatians 1:10). But Paul, the great defender of the faith, was exceedingly careful so as not to unduly offend his weaker brethren. Paul taught that an unwarranted offense was a “**sin against Christ**” (I Corinthians 8:12).

Error is to be undauntedly withstood and sometimes the obviating of error demands plain speech. The words of rebuke may be sharper than a two-edged sword, and oft-times need be, but this does not mean he who gives the reprimand should be tactless and unconcerned about how it will affect the erring brother. The “like it or lump it” attitude manifests a haughty spirit and is antagonistic to the spirit of conciliation. “**Let us not be desirous of vain glory ...**” (Galatians 5:26).

It was in a fellowship meeting at Antioch, that Paul rebuked Peter for his dissimulation. Paul said: “**But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed**” (Galatians 2:11). Paul’s purpose in rebuking Peter was not to embarrass him, but to embolden him in his stand against circumcising Judaism. Paul’s rebuke of Peter was not harsh or hostile and Paul’s desired end in the matter was realized; this particular error of Peter was utterly mitigated, or at least it never again made the inspired record.

Paul’s rebuke of Peter was not intended to alienate him, but to meliorate him, and Paul’s motive, being pure in this matter, God honored his efforts. Later we read where Peter spoke of Paul as “**our beloved brother, Paul**” (II Peter 3:15). In our spiritual swordsmanship, we are to contend for the faith without fear or favor, and as strange as it might seem, this can be done while being as “**harmless as doves**” (Matthew 10:16). The wise pastor knows how to sternly rebuke his people without scolding them, and he knows how to use pulpit vinegar without causing his people to sour on him.

Offenses Are Inevitable

“... **It is impossible but that offenses will come ...**” (Luke 17:1).

It is good for a saint to be offended by the world, for the world is anti-God, and everything that is against God should offend the Christian. The offenses of the world

against the Lord's churches, contrary to its nefarious motives and designs, have served to stabilize them, rather than causing them to stagger. However, the breach created by the trespass of a church member against member or a church against church, retards brotherly edification and bedims the glory of God in His churches.

Sadly, in our day, the attitude or mind-set that gives vent to division and schism in New Testament churches and between churches is not as loathsome and strange as it was a few brief years ago. That which turns brotherly converse into verbal conflict and sets church against church, should be hated with an insatiable passion and utterly avoided, even at the cost of humiliation. Nothing is more destructive to church unity than contending for the faith with a contentious spirit. Baptists all through their history have been obedient to the faith and that without being obdurate. However, it seems that the contemporary church atmosphere is permeated with an acute sensitiveness, and the least variance is sufficient grounds for dis-fellowship. Could it be we are like microwaves and heat up real quick? ***“He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly ...” (Proverbs 14:17).***

The rebuke of error is vital to the church and necessary for its well-being. Then, too, a sure way to grow in grace and knowledge of the truth is correction of error, and when the reproof is made with a heart-felt concern for the erring brother, the brotherly relationship will, as a rule, be enriched and the error purged. On the other hand, if the rebuke is actuated or motivated by any carnal desire, or for any reason other than to gain the erring brother (**Matthew 18:15**), it will most likely confirm the brother in his error.

An honest rebuke is not a verbal thrashing, but it is a zealous effort to mitigate an offense or nullify error, and this godly end can only be realized if **“the spirit of meekness” (Galatians 6:1)** is manifested by all parties involved, for **“an angry man stirreth up strife” (Proverbs 29:22).**

Purity of Motive Precludes Compromise with Error

“Do not err, my beloved brethren” (James 1:16).

Truth is far too precious to sacrifice upon the altar of expediency or compromise, and error is to be exposed at all times and expunged whenever and wherever possible. However, Paul says that the “reproving” and “rebuking” of error is to be done, **“with all longsuffering and doctrine” (II Timothy 4:2).**

An earnest and honest contention for the faith, even though permeated with and manifested by love, will yet gender adversity, and alienate some beloved brethren.

This sad truth is evidenced by the heavy heart of Paul, being motivated by his great love for the erring churches of Galatia, as he said unto them: “**Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?**” (**Galatians 4:16**). Paul’s disdain for the Galatian error was graphically stated, yet it was presented in such a way that the purity of his motive in so doing, was left beyond question.

There was never an ill motive in the heart of the Saviour, and the caption under the picture of His sacrificial life, reads: “He glorified God on the earth” (**John 17:4**). His every thought, word, and deed was motivated by His unflinching determination to glorify His heavenly Father, and Paul says: “... **He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord**” (**II Corinthians 10:17**).

All saved people, in or out of the Lord’s churches, as to nature, are composite beings; they are given a new nature in regeneration, but their old nature is still with them and is as vicious as ever. Owing to a lack of suppression of the old nature, Baptist church members will err, and that most grievously at times. While the Lord’s churches are to never patronize error, they are to follow every step delineated in Scripture in their effort to recover the erring member, before excursive discipline is invoked against him.

After the scriptural admonitions have been followed in spirit and in the letter, and the result is yet negative, there is no recourse left to the church, but exclusion of the offending person from membership of the church. The church is to make no concessions to error, for there is no fellowship so sweet that it merits the least compromise of the word of God, and any such compromise is a dangerous compounding of the error.

Nevertheless, the motive in discipline should never be fleshly gratification, but for the glorification of the Head of the church, which glorification is, in some cases, manifested by the gain of the erring person.

God in wisdom endowed His churches with power to attract and with power to repel, with power to enlist and with power to exclude. The power to repel and exclude is a last resort measure, however, once the necessity has arisen whereby a member must be excluded; the church should not approach the problem with either a tepid or vindictive spirit, but with a spirit of meekness and resolve and concern for the spiritual welfare of the offending brother.

Notwithstanding, there are offenses so atrocious in nature, that the church is left without an option, and must, without delay or deliberation, exclude the guilty person

from the membership of the church (**I Corinthians 5:1, 2**). But, thank God, His churches are not often afflicted with such overwhelming revulsion, but are in its absence given ample time to deal with other forms of leavening and seeds of discord.

There is no offense committed by a Christian brother against his church which is insuperable, and there are no barriers between the Lord's churches which are incapable of being overturned. So as to not vitiate church discipline, all church interaction with the disciplined person must be avoided; no public part of the church service is open to him, and nothing should be done by the immediate church members, nor by any sister church, to desensitize or lessen the effect of the discipline invoked by the membership church.

The censoring of dialogue and the circumscribing of social intercourse with the disciplined person, may, in some instances, be deemed wise, but there is no scriptural mandate which prohibits all social or family communion with the excluded person. The church is never to placate the deposed offender, and if he remains or becomes recalcitrant, the position of the church in his regard should remain intact. However, it is not a compromise on the part of the church to recognize and encourage any conciliatory gesture made by the subject of discipline. Otherwise, no fallen brother would ever be lifted up and restored to fellowship in the disciplining church.

“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; AND AVOID THEM (Romans 16:17) (emphasis OBM).

This Divine injunction is all too often distorted or twisted and made to comprehend each and every variance that may surface, but this is not the force or meaning of it; otherwise, it would spell oblivion for all of the Lord's churches. In the next verse (**18**), Paul identifies for us the persons whom the church is to **“avoid”**. **“For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple”**.

These deceivers are in the church, but they were not **“added”** to it by the Lord Jesus Christ, and their every motive is self-interest and pride. They are to be undeviatingly withstood, and one way to withstand them is to avoid all spiritual fellowship with them. If this avoidance is tenaciously adhered to, their evil designs will be defeated, and in due season it will be manifested that they were never of the Lord (**I John 2:19**).

The least contravention of the word of God is to be taken seriously, but we know that good men, men who steadfastly hold to the gospel of grace and biblical ecclesiology, err in other points of doctrine. The above cited injunction of avoidance (**Romans 16:17**), does not apply to these men, for they love the Lord's churches, and their general motivation comes from a strong desire to be obedient to the will of God in everything.

It is not the aim of these "good men" to create division in the Lord's church(es), and they are just as sure their convictions on these lesser points of doctrine are Holy Spirit wrought, as are those who take variance with them. Thus, there is no scriptural basis for breaking fellowship with them, for if it was so, every New Testament church would be in utter disarray, and fellowship between churches would be out of the question.

All Bible doctrine is essential for spiritual growth and maturity, and doctrinal affinity enhances fellowship. So, there is some room for fellowship among all of the Lord's churches, for they all believe every Christian and church is prone to err, and that we all must wait until we get to heaven to find the perfect Christian and the perfect church.

However, it seems in this evil day, that anything less than perfect agreement between brethren, makes one of them a heretic of the rankest sort. While fellowship between brethren and churches is based on doctrinal accord, it does not mean that every detail of every doctrine must be in place before there can be fellowship. This is a vital truth and needs to be addressed and emphasized, for in so doing, the prospect is that some of the unnecessary divisions which prevail in and among the Lord's churches would be eliminated; there can be condemnation of error without castigation of the errant brother.

Conclusion

"And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity" (II Peter 1:7).

The graces which Peter refers to in this text, are not in every case easy to add, but we should not be quick to give up in our effort to add them. In the spiritual sense, the terms "brother" and "sister" denote a relationship that is eternal, and to enhance that relationship on earth, the perpetual forgiveness of offenses is necessary (**Matthew 18:21, 22**). To preserve and promote peace in the church, Paul said: "... **Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you**" (**Ephesians 4:32**).

The spiritual and discerning church will, upon self-examination, discover that all of its theological jots and tittles are not in place, and that some of its doctrinal walls do not perfectly hew or conform to the sacred plumb-line. Baptist churches are the most glorious institutions on earth; they are the pillar and ground of all divine truth, but there is not one among us who has fully apprehended that for which it has been apprehended, or that needs no further maturity or growth in grace and truth. Let us esteem our membership church most highly, but let us not look down our critical noses and deny an equal greatness to any of the Lord's precious churches. It has not seemed good in the sight of the Lord to bless all of His churches in the same way, but this does not mean He loves one less and another more. In purchasing His churches, the omniscient Christ paid the same price for each of them (**Acts 20:28**), and there is not one among them all which is loved and preferred by Him above another (**Ephesians 5:25**).

The spiritual Christian will readily admit there is much wrong in his discipleship (**I Corinthians 10:12**), and that he comes miserably short in his service to God and his church brothers and sisters. Being aware of these unsavory facts should make us reluctant to adversely criticize those who are walking with us in the troubled path of faith. The least scrutiny of our fellow church members will reveal much in them which we consider to run counter to the honor of God and the best interest of His church. Conversely, the censorship being honest, we will in almost every case, discover that the supposed weak brother is strong in some areas where we are weak, and we could be profited by emulating his strong points.

We are not saying withhold all criticism; on the contrary, a word of rebuke in due season is good (**Proverbs 15:23**), but destructive criticism has no place in social relationships, much less in the Lord's churches. The flesh takes a certain satisfaction from "telling him off", but it often follows that we look back on our temper venting with regret and shame, and conclude: "I wish I had not said that. I surely could have handled that situation in a far better way." "***He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly***" (**Proverbs 14:29**).

The egotism of the old nature is not eradicated by regeneration, but it hangs on with an unrelenting tenacity, and all too often trips up the saint and causes him to unduly assert himself. Thus it was with Peter when he said to his cross-bound Saviour, "**Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee ...**" (**Matthew 26:35**). Knowing the oft deficiency of my faith, I find it difficult to criticize Peter for his haughtiness, or to ask Elijah why he ran from Jezebel, or say to Moses: "Why did you not speak unto the rock instead of smiting it?" (**I Kings 19:1-3; Numbers 20:8-11**).

The devil hates church harmony, peace, and unity. It is his aim to bring discord and confusion in the Lord's churches, and he delights in bitterness and rivalry among church members. However, the devil cannot create this ill condition in the church, apart from help within the church. Sadly, it seems there is always a Sister Eve or a Brother Diotrephes to ally themselves with the devil in his church wrecking scheme. Christ said, "... **Offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come**" (**Luke 17:1**).

The devil is the arch rival of the saint and he infinitely hates the blood bought church of Jesus Christ. He knows that God is glorified in His churches, but he also knows that sin diminishes fellowship with God, and he knows the greater the church is permeated with and persists in sin, the less is God glorified in the ill affected church.

Therefore, it behooves every member to pray fervently for one another, to respect one another, and to spiritually promote one another. A kind word of appreciation goes a long way in quieting the spirit that is caught in the gall of bitterness. After all, it is the meek who inherit the earth, and our Supreme Example said, "**I am meek and lowly in heart**" (**Matthew 11:29**). Beloved, God has already given His best to us and it surely becomes us to give our best to His church (**Ephesians 5:2**).

"Let brotherly love continue" (**Hebrews 13:1**).